

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson and members of the House Families and Aging Committee. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to provide opposition testimony on HB 14.

My name is Lisa DeGeeter and from 1999 to 2001 I had the privilege of serving as the assistant director of the Ohio Task Force on Family Law and Children. The task force was a joint venture between the legislature, the Supreme Court, the governor's office, the State Bar Association, led by mental health professionals and academics. The group was tasked with examining Ohio's family law statutes and court processes and procedures, in order to draft recommendations to enhance the well-being of Ohio's children and families. The task force released a report, *Minimizing Conflicts Maximizing Families* which can be found on the Supreme Court website at [https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/taskforce/report\\_final.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/taskforce/report_final.pdf)

As some of you will no doubt recall, late Chief Justice Moyer appreciated deliberative interdisciplinary processes and he sent this task force report and the guardians ad litem report to the Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Courts. This group reviewed all of the recommendations and released a subsequent report that was entitled *Report and Recommendations on Family Law Reform* which can be found at [https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/taskforce/FLCreport\\_2005.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/taskforce/FLCreport_2005.pdf)

The initial reports and subsequent review included six goals with 29 corresponding recommendations. They recognized that "Establishing and maintaining a parent child relationship is of fundamental importance to the welfare of a child. Therefore, the relationship between a child and both parents should be fostered unless inconsistent with the child's best interest. Further, any legal process that allocates parenting functions and responsibilities should be guided by each child's best interest. " Developmentally appropriate guidelines for parenting plans should be developed and available for use by all families and courts." "All parenting plans should provide for the allocation of parenting functions and responsibilities for all aspects of each child's daily needs consistent with the child's age and developmental level." "Courts should be given more statutory options for dealing with the difficult problems involved in the consideration of requests by one parent to deny or limit access of the other parent to their children, or to information about their children." "A child-centered approach should be used in deciding cases involving the relocation of a child." "Courts should continue to be guided by the best interest standard." "Services that enhance the child's safety and well-being should be provided." *emphasis added*

Consistent with these recommendations, in 2012 the Ohio Supreme Court promulgated guide lines entitled *Planning for Parenting Time: Ohio's Guide for Parents Living Apart* which can be found at <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/Publications/JCS/parentingGuide.pdf> . This document is based on a thorough understanding of child development, and an appreciation that different families have different needs and resources, and provides a variety of developmentally appropriate options.

For more than two decades, Ohio has placed the well-being of children at the center of how courts make decisions. House Bill 14 flies in the face of more than 20 years of data driven, evidence-based work that has been accomplished in Ohio. H.B. 14, as drafted, would subjugate the ability for a court to consider child development, or even treat children as individual people, reducing their daily lives to a zero sum game. Courts will be profoundly limited in addressing issues that arise when a parent is incarcerated or serves in the military, or when a child has special needs, is nursing or there is a large geographic distance between the parents' new residences. Children are not chattels subject to equitable distribution, and parents have much more responsibility than simply asserting a possessory interest. The sponsors of HB 14 have identified a real problem facing Ohio families. Meaningful solutions will be created by building on the foundation that has been established. Ignoring the strides Ohio's courts have made, and a deep history of interdisciplinary work, would be a step backwards.